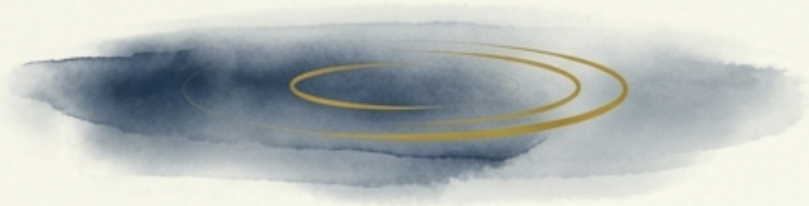

The Sevenfold Path to a Clear Mind

An Ancient Guide to Overcoming Mental Defilements

Based on the Sabbāsavasutta, a discourse of the Buddha.

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Our journey begins in the “thicket of views.”

An untrained mind gives rise to “defilements”—unskillful mental states that cause stress and suffering. The Buddha describes this state as being lost in:

- The thicket of views
- The desert of views
- The twist of views
- The fetter of views

“An unlearned ordinary person who is fettered by views is not freed from... sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress. They’re not freed from suffering, I say.”

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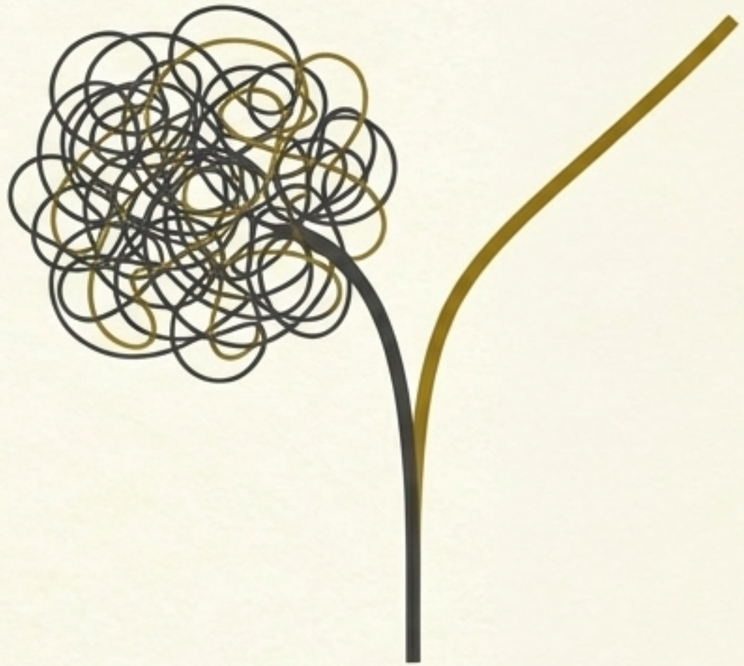
The path to freedom hinges on one crucial skill.

The Buddha states that the ending of defilements is for one who knows and sees the difference between:

Irrational Application of Mind
When practiced, defilements arise, and once arisen they grow.



Rational Application of Mind
When practiced, defilements don’t arise, and those that have already arisen are given up.

This is not about what you think, but *how* you think.

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The Sevenfold Path for Restraining All Defilements

Some defilements should be given up by seeing, some by restraint, some by using, some by enduring, some by avoiding, some by dispelling, and some by developing.

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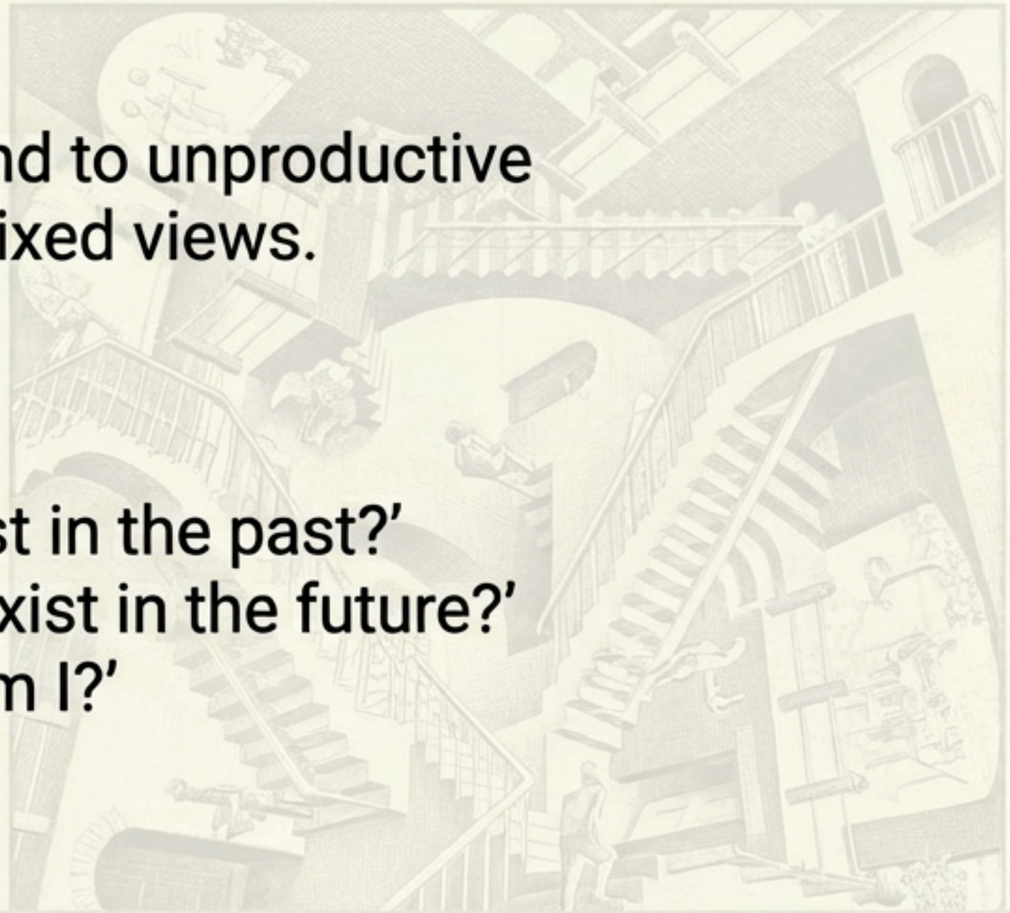
1. The Path of Seeing: How Irrational Thought Creates Confusion



An “unlearned person” applies their mind to unproductive questions, leading them into a web of fixed views.

Examples of Irrational Questions:

- ‘Did I exist in the past? Did I not exist in the past?’
- ‘Will I exist in the future? Will I not exist in the future?’
- ‘Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I?’

This leads to a “fetter of views,” such as the conviction: “My self survives” or “My self does not survive.”

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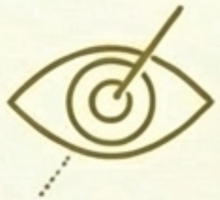

1. The Path of Seeing: Focusing on What Truly Matters

Core Concept: A ‘learned noble disciple’ understands which things to apply the mind to.

The Rational Focus:

Instead of speculation, they rationally apply the mind to the Four Noble Truths:

1. ‘This is suffering.’
2. ‘This is the origin of suffering.’
3. ‘This is the cessation of suffering.’
4. ‘This is the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering.’

Result: By seeing clearly, they give up three fundamental fetters: substantialist view, doubt, and misapprehension of precepts.

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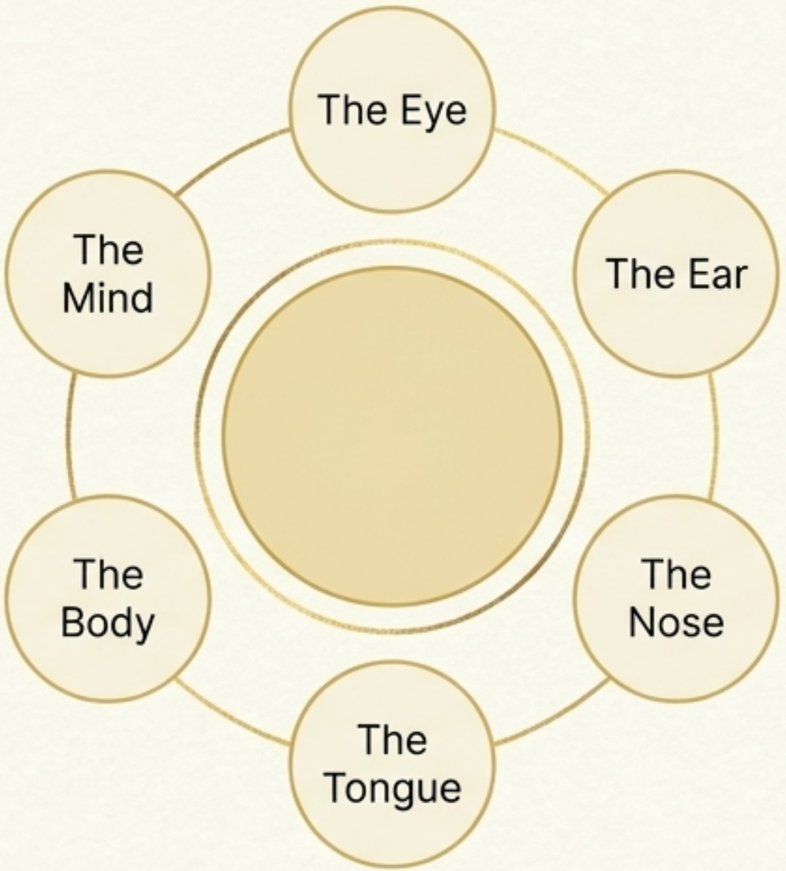
2. The Path of Restraint: Guarding the Gates of the Senses

Core Concept: By rationally reflecting, one lives restraining the sense faculties to prevent “distressing and feverish defilements” from arising in the first place.



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3. The Path of Using: Relating Wisely to Life's Necessities

Core Concept: By rationally reflecting, one uses material things for their essential purpose, not for indulgence, adornment, or decoration.

Robes: For protection from the elements and covering the body.

Almsfood: To sustain the body and support spiritual practice.

Lodgings: For shelter from harsh weather and to enjoy retreat.

Medicine: To ward off illness and promote good health.

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4. The Path of Enduring: Cultivating Resilient Patience

Core Concept: By rationally reflecting, one endures unavoidable difficulties without allowing them to generate mental defilements.

What to Endure:

- **Environmental Hardships':** Cold, heat, hunger, thirst.
- **Physical Annoyances':** The touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and reptiles.
- **Interpersonal Conflict':** “Rude and unwelcome criticism.”
- **Bodily Pain':** “Sharp, severe, acute, unpleasant, disagreeable, and life-threatening.”

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5. The Path of Avoiding: Choosing Your Environment Wisely

Core Concept: By rationally reflecting, one avoids people, places, and situations that are known sources of physical danger or spiritual unwholesomeness.

What to Avoid

****Physical Dangers****

- A wild elephant, a wild horse, a snake, a pit, a cliff.

****Physical Dangers****

- A wild elephant, a wild horse, a snake, a pit, a clif, a cliff.

****Unskillful Environments****

- Inappropriate seats, walking in inappropriate neighborhoods.

****Harmful Company****

- Mixing with bad friends—whatever sensible spiritual companions would believe to be a bad setting.

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6. The Path of Dispelling: Actively Removing Unskillful Thoughts

Core Concept: By rationally reflecting, one does not tolerate unskillful thoughts that have arisen in the mind.

The Method:

Instead of letting them linger, one immediately:

- Gives them up
- Gets rid of them
- Eliminates them
- And obliterates them

Targets for Dispelling:

Sensual thoughts, malicious thoughts, cruel thoughts, and “any bad, unskillful qualities that have arisen.”

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7. The Path of Developing: Cultivating the Factors of Awakening

By rationally reflecting, one develops the wholesome mental qualities that are the foundation of insight.

These qualities “rely on seclusion, fading away, and cessation, and ripen as letting go.”

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The Result: An End of Suffering

“When a mendicant has mastered all seven paths, they are called one who:

- ...lives having restrained all defilements,
- ...has cut off craving,
- ...cast off the fetters,
- ...and by rightly comprehending conceit has made an end of suffering.”

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A Complete Toolkit for the Mind

Seeing: Understand the cause of suffering.

Restraining: Guard the senses.

Developing: Cultivate a wholesome mind.

Using: Relate wisely to material things.

Enduring: Patiently bear hardship.

Avoiding: Steer clear of harm.

Dispelling: Remove unskillful thoughts.

Healing: Casing and suffering.

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Source: Sabbāsavasutta — Middle Discourses 2
Translation by Bhikkhu Sujato

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